

Protesters regain control of third bridge in Baghdad

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Reuters

ID:

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Sun, 2019-11-17 16:16

BAGHDAD: Iraqi protesters regained control of a third bridge leading to Baghdad's Green Zone on Sunday, taking further ground in the biggest wave of anti-government demonstrations in decades.

Security forces used tear gas and stun bombs to prevent protesters from getting right across Ahrar Bridge in central Baghdad, part of a weeks-long attempt to disrupt traffic and reach the Green Zone housing government ministry and embassies.

Protesters made a barricade of old cabinets, trash cans and metal sheeting on the bridge while security forces took positions behind blast walls installed to prevent protesters from crossing to the other side. Protesters who choked on the tear gas were evacuated by tuk-tuk, a Reuters cameraman said.

On Saturday, Iraqi demonstrators reoccupied part of adjacent Sinak Bridge and a nearby tall building in Baghdad that security forces had pushed them away from a week before. They have held a third bridge, Jamhuriya, since October 25.

More than 300 people have been killed since the start of mass unrest in Baghdad and southern Iraq in early October, the largest demonstrations since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Protesters are demanding the overthrow of a political class seen as corrupt and beholden to foreign interests.

In Basra in the south, dozens of protesters burned tires and briefly blocked some roads on Sunday, before police managed to restore control and reopen them, police said.

The unrest has shattered the relative calm that followed the defeat of Islamic State in 2017.



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Iraq officials: Protesters surge toward Baghdad's Green Zone Four killed in Baghdad as Iraq protests see no letup

[Algeria kicks off presidential campaign, 5 candidates to run](#)

Author:

By AOMAR OUALI | AP

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1574005199414922100

Sun, 2019-11-17 14:28

ALGIERS: Algeria's presidential campaign officially kicked off Sunday with five candidates vying to replace the country's longtime leader, who was pushed out in April amid sustained protests.

Two former prime ministers, Ali Benflis and Abdelmadjid Tebboune, are among those running in the Dec. 12 election to succeed former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Big crowds took to the streets Friday for a 39th consecutive week to demand

an end to Algeria's post-colonial political system. Protesters say they don't trust those currently in power to ensure democratic elections, citing their past links to Bouteflika.

Benflis and Tebboune are considered the favorites of the vote.

The other candidates are: former tourism minister and moderate Islamist Abdelkader Bengrina; former culture minister and current interim secretary of the RND party that was in the governing coalition, Azzedine Mihoubi; and Belaid Abdelaziz, who heads the small El Moustakbel (Future) party that's close to the FLN, both of which remain part of the ruling coalition.

In some neighborhoods of Algiers, protesters have hung black trash bags on billboards featuring the candidates' portraits, often sprayed with the words "election of shame" and "traitors."

Benflis said this week that "this election is not held in ideal conditions, I know that, but I consider it is the shorter and less risky path to get Algeria out of the political impasse caused by the former regime."

Tebboune acknowledged the "special climate" of the electoral process.

Speaking on television earlier this month, he justified his candidacy by saying he wanted to "put Algeria back on good tracks."

"Some Algerians are against the election, but I know a majority are for it," he said.

Army chief Ahmed Gaid Salah, who has emerged as the country's authority figure, repeatedly vowed that "all security conditions will be met so that Algerians can fulfill their electoral duty in full serenity."



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[Blast in northern Sinai kills 3 Egyptian troops](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-11-17 18:29

EL-ARISH, Egypt: A roadside bomb killed at least three members of the security forces in northern Sinai province, The explosion hit their armored vehicle Sunday in the town of Sheikh Zuweid. Four other security force members were wounded, including an officer. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Egypt has for years been battling an insurgency in the northern Sinai Peninsula that's now led by a Daesh affiliate.



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Egypt army kills 83 militants in North Sinai
Egypt: At least 20 killed in airstrikes in northern Sinai

Hariri and Aoun trade blame as PM candidate's withdrawal plunges Lebanon further into crisis

Sun, 2019-11-17 17:10

BEIRUT: Lebanon's outgoing prime minister blasted the party of the country's president on Sunday after the withdrawal of a top candidate to replace him plunged the country into further turmoil.

Mohammad Safadi, a former finance minister, withdrew his candidacy late on Saturday, saying it was too difficult to form a "harmonious" government with broad political support.

Safadi was the first candidate who had appeared to win some consensus among Lebanon's fractious sectarian-based parties since Saad Hariri quit as prime minister on Oct. 29, pushed out by sweeping protests against the ruling elite

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

The withdrawal of Safadi narrowed the chances of creating a government needed to enact urgent reforms.

Reflecting the brittle political climate, President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) accused Hariri of undermining Safadi's bid in order to keep the job for himself.

"Saad (al-Hariri) is delaying things with the goal of burning all the names and emerging as the saviour," said a source familiar with the FPM's view.

A statement by Hariri's office rejected the FPM assertion as an irresponsible attempt to "score points" despite Lebanon's "major national crisis".

Faced by the worst financial strains since a 1975-1990 civil war, Lebanon has pledged urgent reforms it hopes will convince donors to disburse some \$11 billion pledged last year.

The unrest has kept banks shut for most of the last month. They have imposed controls on transfers abroad and US dollar withdrawals, and the pegged Lebanese pound is under pressure on an informal market.

Safadi became the presumed front-runner for prime minister after a meeting between Hariri, a Sunni politician, and Shiite groups Hezbollah and Amal,

according to political sources and Lebanese media, but no political force later endorsed him.

Lebanon's prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim, according to its sectarian power-sharing system.

Protesters who have filled the streets since Oct. 17 hit out at the choice of Safadi, a prominent businessman and longtime politician they said was part of the elite they sought to oust.

"We are in a deadlock now. I don't know when it will move again. It is not easy," said a senior political source. "The financial situation doesn't tolerate any delay."

A second political source described efforts to form a new government as "back to square one."

Safadi's withdrawal leaves the powerful, Iran-backed Hezbollah and its allies with even fewer options unless they push for a close Sunni ally, a scenario that would likely reduce the chances of Lebanon winning international support. Hezbollah is classified as a terrorist group by the United States and many other countries.

Hezbollah and Amal, along with Aoun, a Maronite Christian, have sought for Hariri to return as premier while including both technocrats and politicians in a new cabinet.

But Hariri, who is aligned with Gulf Arab states and the West, has said he will only return as prime minister if he is able to form a cabinet composed entirely of specialists capable of attracting the international support.

Global ratings agency S&P flashed the latest warning on Lebanon's debt-saddled economy on Friday, lowering its foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings deeper into junk territory to 'CCC/C' from 'B-/B'.

Lebanon's bank staff said they would continue a nationwide strike on Monday that has kept banks shut. The strike is over safety fears as depositors demand access to their money. Union members are set to meet on Monday to discuss a security plan to keep branches safe.



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[Lebanon protests](#)

Artists take a stand in Lebanon's peaceful uprising
Medics protest economic crisis in Lebanon

[Khamenei dismisses deadly protests sweeping Iran, hundreds arrested in crackdown](#)

Author:

AFP

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1573994864344034700

Sun, 2019-11-17 11:43

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader on Sunday threw his support behind a decision

to hike petrol prices, a move that sparked nationwide unrest in which he said “some lost their lives.”

A policeman was killed in the western city of Kermanshah in a clash with armed “rioters”, the second confirmed death since protests erupted across Iran on Friday.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei blamed “hooligans” for damaging property despite widespread anger at the increases and as Iranians suffer from the country’s economic woes.

WATCH: Thousands of protesters march in Shiraz on Saturday as part of protests that erupted on Friday in response to a sharp increase in fuel prices [#IranProtests](https://t.co/9vI7rAU8IC) <https://t.co/9vI7rAU8IC>
[pic.twitter.com/gBRFi3N002](https://t.co/9vI7rAU8IC)

– Arab News (@arabnews) [November 17, 2019](https://t.co/9vI7rAU8IC)

Several people were also wounded and dozens arrested in two days of demonstrations that saw motorists block highways and others attack and set fire to public property.

In a speech aired on state television, Khamenei said “some lost their lives and some centres were damaged”.

The White House on Sunday condemned Iran for using “lethal force” against the demonstrators.

“The United States supports the Iranian people in their peaceful protests against the regime that is supposed to lead them,” White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham said.

[#IranProtests](https://t.co/4oSuAUwzRp): University of Tehran. They are chanting: Oil income has been lost, [cuz] it has been spent on Basiji (Basij: The paramilitary arm of the IRGC) <https://t.co/4oSuAUwzRp>

– Bahman Kalbasi (@BahmanKalbasi) [November 17, 2019](https://t.co/4oSuAUwzRp)

State news agency IRNA said the protests struck more than 100 Iranian cities and towns. Iran’s semi-official Fars news agency said 1,000 protesters had

been arrested and 100 banks torched.

The protests flared hours after it was announced that the price of petrol would be raised by 50 percent for the first 60 litres (16 gallons) and by 300 percent for anything above that each month.

It is a rise many consumers can ill afford, given that Iran's economy has been battered since May last year when President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from a 2015 nuclear agreement and reimposed crippling sanctions.

The rial has plummeted, inflation is running at more than 40 percent and the International Monetary Fund expects Iran's economy to contract by 9.5 percent this year and stagnate in 2020.

The petrol pricing plan was agreed by the High Council of Economic Coordination made up of the president, parliament speaker and judiciary chief.

Confirmed: [#Iran](#) is now in the midst of a near-total national internet shutdown; realtime network data show connectivity at 7% of ordinary levels after twelve hours of progressive network disconnections as public protests continue [#IranProtests](#)

<https://t.co/1Al0DT8an1> pic.twitter.com/u6bVsfv00m

– NetBlocks.org (@netblocks) [November 16, 2019](#)

Khamenei said that “I am not an expert and there are different opinions but I had said that if the heads of the three branches make a decision I will support it.

“The heads of the branches made a decision with the backing of expert opinion and naturally it must be implemented,” he said.

“Some people would definitely get upset over this decision... but damaging and setting fire (to property) is not something (normal) people would do. It is hooligans.”

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Following his speech, parliament cancelled a motion to reverse the price hike, semi-official news agency ISNA reported.

Some of the worst violence was in the central city of Sirjan, where acting governor Mohammad Mahmoudabadi said a civilian was killed and fuel stations were among the public property attacked and damaged.

In Kermanshah, a policeman died Sunday, a day after a "confrontation with a number of rioters and thugs," the provincial police chief told IRNA.

In Tehran on Saturday, protesters were seen shouting slogans and burning tyres on a street.

Similar scenes were witnessed in the cities of Shiraz, Isfahan and Bushehr, where security forces fired tear gas and water cannon at demonstrators.

Forty "disruptors" were arrested in the central city of Yazd after clashing with police, the province's public prosecutor told ISNA on Sunday. Most were not locals, he added.

Police said security forces would "not hesitate to confront those disrupting peace and security and will identify the ringleaders and field forces and confront them".

The intelligence ministry said those behind the unrest "have been identified" and that measures would be taken against them, according to ISNA.

Access to the internet has been restricted since the demonstrations broke out.

Netblocks, an internet monitoring website, said late Saturday the country was in the grip of a shutdown.

"Confirmed: Iran is now in the midst of a near-total national internet shutdown; realtime network data show connectivity at 7% of ordinary levels after twelve hours of progressive network disconnections," it said on Twitter.

It came after a decision by the Supreme National Security Council, according to a report by ISNA on Sunday.

"Upon the decision of the Security Council of Iran and communicated to internet operators, access to internet has been limited as of last night and for 24 hours," it said, quoting what it called an informed source at the information and communications technology ministry.



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Internet restricted in protest-hit Iran: report